DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 076 SO 032 494

AUTHOR Douglass, Susan L.
TITLE Teaching about Religion in National and State Social Studies Standards. Executive Summary.
INSTITUTION Council on Islamic Education, Fountain Valley, CA.; Vanderbilt Univ., Nashville, TN. Freedom Forum First Amendment Center.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 28p.
AVAILABLE FROM Council on Islamic Education, P.O. Box 20186, Fountain Valley, CA 92708-0186. Tel: 714-839-2929; Fax: 714-839-2714; e-mail: info@cie.org. For full text: http://www.cie.org/pdffiles/CIE_Execsum.PDF.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidelines; *History; National Standards; *Public Schools; *Religion; *Religion Studies; *Social Studies; State Standards
IDENTIFIERS *World Religions

ABSTRACT

This executive summary is an overview of the complete study of current national and state standards documents pertaining to history and social studies, focusing on the teaching about religion. The complete study analyzes the standards and program frameworks in seven national curriculum documents and the academic standards documents and curriculum frameworks developed and adopted by most of the 50 states. References to religion in each document were identified based on a series of keywords. The placement, quantity, and characteristics of content on religion is encouraging, but the study reveals limitations and gaps in integrating discussion of the human religious experience in the nation's social studies standards. Despite religion's secure place in state and national standards, it is possible to conclude that teaching about religion in U.S. public school social studies programs is limited, and it is questionable whether the topic is being pursued with much seriousness or depth. The executive summary addresses the study's objectives and methodology, profiles the seven national curriculum documents and the state standards and framework documents, and highlights the study's conclusions and recommendations. (BT)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teaching About Religion

IN NATIONAL AND STATE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Prepared by
Susan L. Douglass, Council on Islamic Education
in collaboration with the First Amendment Center

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Council on Islamic Education

9300 Gardenia Street, #B3
Fountain Valley, CA 92708
(714) 839-2929
www.cie.org

FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER
FUNDED BY THE FREEDOM FORUM

1207 18th Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37212
(615) 321-9588
www.freedomforum.org

Project Coordinators:	Shabbir Mansuri, Susan Douglass, Charles Haynes, Marcia Beauchamp
Editor:	Janet Mandelstam
Design:	S.Watson
Publication No.:	00-F08
To order:	1-800-830-3733

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Teaching About Religion

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Contents

Foreword 5

Shabbir Mansuri, Founding Director, Council on Islamic Education

Charles C. Haynes, Senior Scholar for Religious Freedom, First Amendment Center

Executive Summary 7

Susan L. Douglass, Council on Islamic Education

The Emergence of Standards Documents 7

Coverage of Religion in the Standards Documents 8

Objectives of the Study 8

Methodology of the Study 9

Analysis of Teaching about Religion in the National Models 10

Analysis of State Standards and Framework Documents 13

Overview of the Study's Conclusions and Recommendations 20

Foreword

This important study by the Council on Islamic Education arrives at a critical moment in the history of public education. Over the past decade, religious and educational groups from across the political and religious spectrum have adopted a series of consensus guidelines on the role of religious liberty in schools. The measure of just how far we have come was highlighted in early 2000 when every public-school principal in the United States received a packet of these guides from the U.S. Department of Education.[1] For the first time in our history, school officials have a legal safe harbor for addressing many perennial conflicts over religion in schools, from student religious expression to teaching about religion in the curriculum. Where they are being applied in local school districts, these agreements are enabling a growing number of communities to find common ground on the appropriate role of religion in the public schools.

One of the most important areas of agreement concerns the importance of teaching about religion—as distinguished from religious indoctrination—in the curriculum. Guidelines issued by 18 major educational and religious organizations explain that study about religion is not only constitutional, it is also an important part of a good education:

> Because religion plays a significant role in history and society, study about religion is essential to understanding both the nation and the world. Omission of facts about religion can give students the false impression that the religious life of humankind is insignificant or unimportant. Failure to understand even the basic symbols, practices, and concepts of the various religions makes much of history, literature, art, and contemporary life unintelligible.
>
> Study about religion is also important if students are to value religious liberty, the first freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Moreover, knowledge of the roles of religion in the past and present promotes cross-cultural understanding essential to democracy and world peace.[2]

Consensus statements resolving contentious issues concerning religion are a major step forward for public schools. But such agreements mean little unless they are translated into real change in the curriculum. That is why the findings of this report are so timely and revealing.

This is the first study to elucidate precisely the nature and scope of the coverage of religion in national and state standards. Since much curriculum reform is tied to the content of standards, it is highly significant that the social studies standards now include many opportunities to study about religion. At the same time, a closer look uncovers a number of problems, including weaknesses in the treatment of religion in history and the absence of study about religion in some key areas of the social studies. These and other findings will assist curriculum writers in planning for future revisions of state standards, aid publishers in aligning the content of textbooks more closely to the standards, and help educators understand where and how to include study about religion in this era of standards-based education.

The collaboration between the Council on Islamic Education and the First Amendment Center represented by this study is based on a shared commitment to encourage accurate and balanced teaching about world religions in public education. We believe that public schools demonstrate fairness under the First Amendment when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education. And we are convinced that learning about the various religious ways of understanding the world, past and present, will help prepare students to be knowledgeable, compassionate, and responsible citizens in a diverse society.

Shabbir Mansuri
Founding Director
Council on Islamic Education

Charles C. Haynes
Senior Scholar
First Amendment Center

[1] A complete set of these guidelines may be obtained from the First Amendment Center. They are also available on-line at www.ed.gov and www.freedomforum.org.

[2] The full text of "Religion in the Public School Curriculum: Questions and Answers" may be found in *Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education* by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas (First Amendment Center, 1998).

Executive Summary

This summary is an overview of the complete study of current national and state standards documents pertaining to history and social studies researched and written by Susan L. Douglass, conducted by the Council on Islamic Education (CIE), Shabbir Mansuri, Founding Director, in collaboration with the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, Charles C. Haynes, Senior Scholar. The study focuses on the teaching about religion and includes findings and recommendations to improve teaching about religion in social studies classes as expressed in standards and curriculum documents.

The full study represents the commitment of both CIE and the First Amendment Center to guidelines that ensure accuracy, balance and fairness in the teaching about world religions in U.S. instructional materials and curricula.

The Emergence of Standards Documents

Several strands of educational change have converged in the current national cycle of curriculum reform. When combined, they lend the process far greater impact than a mere adjustment of the cogs and wheels in our public education system. First, the tremendous expansion in scholarship, knowledge and communication technologies has caused education, business and political leaders to focus on what students need to learn for success in higher education and the workplace. Second, demographic, economic and social profiles in the United States are changing. Social cohesion, cultural integrity and effective civic participation are viewed as benefits of a historically and geographically literate citizenry. Third, the requirements of the global economy dictate increased emphasis on knowledge of history, geography, economics, and civics. The fourth strand of change is the standards-based education movement, which aims to improve individual competency by raising academic standards and increasing student, teacher, and school system accountability.

Several national standards and curriculum models were developed in the 1980s and 1990s, and state standards development followed this lead. At the start of the new millennium, some states were still in development, while others were already undergoing their first cycle of revision. Backed by legislation that requires accountability, state standards and framework documents will constitute the most important determinants of classroom content for the coming years. This movement represents a departure from the situation just over a decade ago when instructional

guidelines issued by state departments of education often had little impact on what was taught in classrooms, and standardized testing of specific content at the district or state level was rare. Commercially produced textbooks and teacher inclinations have often been more significant determinants of instruction.

Developments in teaching about religion form an additional strand of change reflected in the current cycle of curriculum reform. A new consensus for teaching about religion has developed to supplant the earlier sentiment that teaching about religion in schools could lead to social disharmony and might even be unconstitutional. In the 1980s, historians, theologians, jurists and educators successfully disseminated the view that study of religions is constitutionally permissible and educationally important: it promotes understanding of peoples whose faith and ethics are different from one's own, and it takes account of the significance of religion in history and culture. The major factor leading to acceptance of content on religions was the development of criteria and instructional guidelines that clearly differentiated between "teaching religion" and "teaching about religion."

Considerable evidence from across the United States demonstrates widespread acceptance of teaching about religion in the social studies, including expanded coverage of religions in American and world history textbooks and curriculum. (Some content also appears in literature and arts standards.) Additional evidence comes from national education organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, which have demonstrated that they value teaching about religion through numerous publications and by including the topic in regional and national conferences for more than a decade.

Despite sharp disagreement over what and how students should learn in core subject areas – and particularly in history – progress toward increasing and improving teaching about religion can be measured by its presence in current standards documents.

Coverage of Religion in the Standards Documents

The premise of this study of religion in social studies standards documents is that the publication of learning and performance standards at the national and state level over the past decade allows observers of these developments to take a snapshot of current thinking about content on religions, the structure of such content within social studies curriculum, and how it is to be interpreted and taught in the classroom. State standards documents in each subject area will determine content in teaching, textbooks, and testing over the next several years. The study of religion in the standards is useful in at least three ways: First, the centralizing effect of the standards in determining classroom content provides an opportunity to gauge coverage of religion from state to state. Second, analysis of the amount and type of teaching about religion also provides insight into the approach states take with respect to world and US history at large, and how this affects the quality and quantity of the academic study of religions across the country. Third, coverage of religion in the standards documents serves as one measurable marker or indicator reflecting the trajectory of curriculum reform as a whole.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and quantify direct and indirect references to teaching about religion in the national and state social studies standards documents.

2. To determine **whether the language of mandated content meets recognized guidelines** for teaching about religion.
3. To identify topics of study where **references to religion are lacking, inappropriate or ineffective** in mandated content or in the structure of the overall program.
4. To compare the **amount of content in the various states,** and to assess how the various curriculum models reflected in the state and national documents differ in amount and approach to teaching about religions.
5. To assess the instructional **implications of current content** on religions and the potential for further development of teaching about religion and religious thought beyond the rudimentary introduction to world religions and the typical discussion of religion in US history.

Methodology of the Study

To meet its objectives, this study analyzes the standards and program frameworks in seven national curriculum documents, most of which were published in the early 1990s, and the academic standards documents and curriculum frameworks developed and adopted (or undergoing adoption) by most of the fifty states. The complete titles of state documents included in this study are listed in Appendix I of the full version of the study.

References to religion in each document were identified based on a series of keywords such as *religion, religious, faith, beliefs, belief systems,* and *worship,* as well as mention of specific religions or religious institutions, teachings and their adherents. Indirect references included keywords such as *culture, tradition, ideals, values* and *ethics,* which often imply or include religion; any glossaries in the documents were consulted to confirm that the definitions include religion. These references were compiled on a table for each document:

Title of National Model or State Standards Document

TYPE OF REFERENCE				
religion, religious				
beliefs, belief system				
Buddhism + related terms				
Christianity + related terms				
Hinduism + related terms				
Islam + related terms				
Judaism + related terms				
other specific religion				
ideals, morals, values, ethics				
culture				
tradition				

The documents differ widely in size and scope from brief lists of skills to detailed, multi-level content outlines with thematic strands, skills and teaching examples. The national documents were described in terms of their organization and content and then analyzed according to the quantity, placement and quality of references to teaching about religion. The state documents were grouped as nearly as possible according to their adherence to the national curriculum models. Variations within the model and typical as well as unusual references to teaching about religion were described. Finally, observations were made on the group of documents and the effects of the dominant model on teaching about religions within the overall social studies program. The study analyzes the language used in references to religion and its appropriateness within the guidelines for teaching about religion published in *Finding Common Ground, 3rd Edition* (Haynes and Thomas, eds., First

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Amendment Center, 1998). References to specific religions were compared in broad terms, without emphasizing a narrow scorecard approach. Other attributes of references to religion were analyzed, such as their integration into the study of history, geography, civics or other disciplines, whether the course framework and overall approach to the subject provide an effective vehicle for achieving the stated mandates. Attention was paid, for example, to content overload, grade level appropriateness, and whether the approach obstructs clear understanding of the religious topic. Finally, observations were made on cross-curricular inclusion of teaching about religion in language arts, fine arts, and music standards documents.

Analysis of Teaching about Religion in the National Models

The seven major social studies documents were described with regard to scope, approach, and content on teaching about religions.

The National Council for Social Studies *Expectations of Excellence*

The National Council for Social Studies' ***Expectations of Excellence*** is a model for K-12 coverage of ten thematic strands that include the major disciplines of social studies. Each thematic strand is linked to a set of standards and benchmarks and examples of classroom practice. The document is intended as a framework into which national standards in a core subject such as history, geography, economics or civics might be inserted. The NCSS expectations, or standards, benchmarks and exemplars, for each theme are mostly quite general.

Expectations of Excellence contains only 21 direct references to teaching about religion; these are mandates to study either religious beliefs in general or specific traditions. Users must rely mainly upon the document's plentiful indirect references to *culture, tradition* and *custom*, and discussion of civilizations. Definitions of these terms given in *Expectations* included religious beliefs, however. Despite numerous statements in support of teaching about religions by the NCSS, the organization's curriculum model provides little specific guidance on placement or elaboration of teaching about religion.

The National Standards for History

The ***National Standards for History, Basic Edition,*** is a detailed outline for history content and related skills that provides a framework for an overall, history-dominant social studies program. The US and world history standards emphasize essential knowledge and clear performance benchmarks structured around an innovative teaching model based on the study of historical eras.

Teaching about religion is very well represented in the *National History Standards*. Direct references to teaching about religion, both general and specific to each tradition, number 158 and are fairly evenly distributed across the eras, with somewhat fewer in modern eras. Era 3, for example, is entitled "Classical Traditions, Major Religions and Giant Empires." Era 4 includes Islam and the medieval Church. These references cover the characteristics of religions, religious institutions, intellectual and spiritual traditions and their social, economic and cultural influences. Indirect references such as *culture, tradition* and *values* number well over 100, reinforcing coverage of teaching about religion in the overall outline. The *National Standards for History* offer curriculum designers and teachers many opportunities to cover aspects of religion in lower and upper grades in US and world history. The content-specific, multi-layered knowledge and performance standards and supporting essays and charts show how teaching about religion can be presented in a dynamic manner that covers individual faiths and cultures through time, as

well as interregional, intercultural and global influences during various periods of history.

The Bradley Commission Model: Building a History Curriculum

The Bradley Commission Report on History in the Schools was a highly important contribution to raising the profile of history within the social studies disciplines. Arguing for a dominant, integrative role for history study in the overall social studies program, it discouraged the practice of teaching repetitive, overstuffed one-year survey courses in US and world history. *Building a US History Curriculum* and *Building a World History Curriculum* suggested course programs for K-12 social studies that integrate sequential history courses from elementary through high school. The organizing principle of *Building a History* is the chronological framework of eras for US and world history. Its major weakness is the lack of explanation of the significance or relationship of topics in each era, but the chronological framework helps integrate history and geography content. Nonetheless, the Bradley model emphasizes differences between European and other societies, and recommends "*close study of one or two selected non-Western societies*" rather than global sweep. Thus, it fails to include many periods and regions in non-European history that were significant for world religions.

Teaching about religion is an integral part of *Building a History Curriculum*. In world history, 27 general references to religion and 72 on specific traditions are complemented by indirect references under thematic categories. Content on religions is unevenly distributed, however, and investigation of traditions other than Christianity is mainly confined to one era, with coverage of religions in the modern era weak and somewhat negative in approach. *Building a US History Curriculum* has 56 general and specific references to religion, concentrated in the first four eras. Fading discussion of religion in later US history is typical but surprising in a model that raised the prominence of history education and innovated in other areas. The paucity and unevenness of guidance on specific content is inconsistent with the overall tenor of the document.

Importance of the World History Model for Teaching about Religions

The ***National Standards for History,*** and to some extent *Building a World History Curriculum*, exemplify a new model for teaching world history that emphasizes thematic historical periods called "eras." This model differs significantly from traditional study of a sequence of discrete civilizations in which development of Western civilization was the dominant theme. Non-Western societies were often shortchanged, making it difficult to teach about cultural interactions and historical processes that encom-

Diagram of Coverage under the World History Model

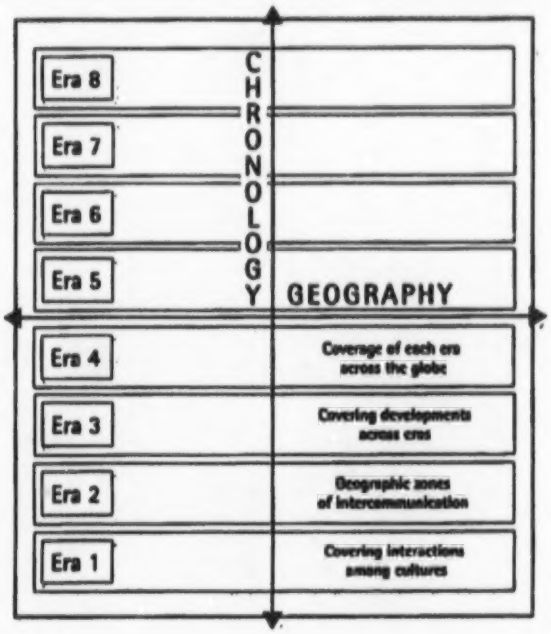

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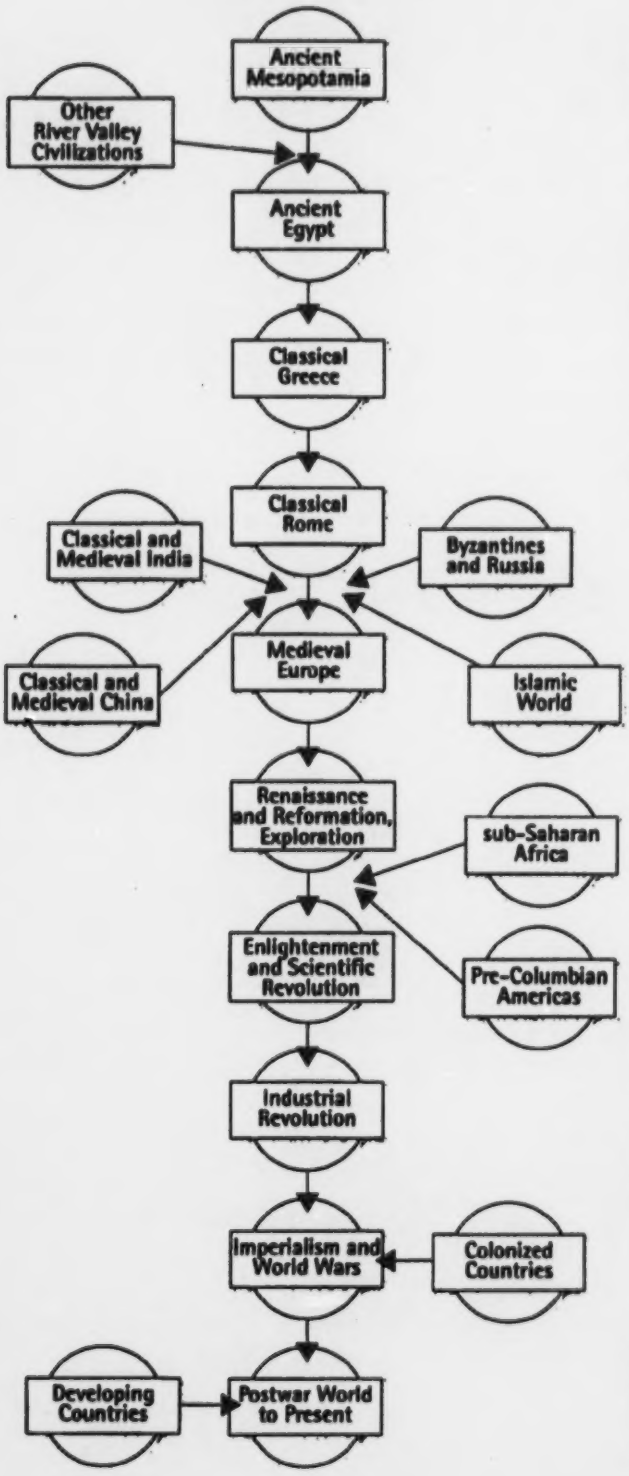
Diagram of Traditional Manner of Covering World History



passed geographic space beyond their boundaries. The spread of religions is a good example of such a cross-cultural, geographically broad process.

The new world history model takes as its canvas the globe in each given era. Major civilizations and regional cultures are studied in their larger geographic context, and significant historical relationships among them are discussed. Zones of communication that played important roles in the spread of religions are studied within this model, but often escape notice in traditional world history presentations. Most important, the new world history model follows cultures through the eras with implications for study of their religious thought and institutions over time.

The National Geography Standards

Geography for Life: the National Geography Standards is a comprehensive model for surveying geographic science and cultural studies that successfully integrates history, geography and other social science disciplines.

Geography for Life includes many references to religions, well distributed across regions and cultures around the globe, as well as many indirect references under *culture*. Discussion of religion and religious influences emphasizes a contemporary rather than a historical focus, but includes background. In the various levels of the standards, 25 general references to religion and related terms, and 30 references to specific traditions are augmented by numerous references in the essays and explanatory material.

The geography standards mention religion under a variety of topics. If the standards are used as a model for instruction, teaching about religion can be expected to reflect considerable depth and breadth in geography lessons at all levels. But these high standards raise questions concerning imple-

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mentation of the content. *Geography for Life* recommends teaching geography skills early and often by integrating them into the whole program but makes few recommendations for structuring a K-12 program that will optimize chances of meeting the standards. The document will be used in many states as the framework for stand-alone geography courses at the middle and high school levels, but the combination of contemporary emphasis and overly summarized historical background makes for content overload unless students have a solid background in history.

National Standards for Civics and Government

National Standards for Civics and Government is a 100-page document whose content standards are organized around five questions related to definitions, principles of American democracy and the US political system, the US Constitution, foreign and domestic affairs, and citizenship. Content standards of increasing complexity and depth form the replies to these questions, with performance benchmarks and exemplars. These categories repeat at increasing levels of difficulty throughout the K-12 program.

Teaching about religion is liberally included. The 45 general and specific references discuss religion in private life, cite laws concerning religious discrimination and the right to freedom of religion, and mention the benefits of diversity. Foundations of government in various nations and societies are compared for sources of authority and legitimacy that stem from religions and other beliefs and values. The standards contrast the role of religion in the personal sphere and its interface with civil society under limited government.

Teaching about religion appears at all grade levels of the *National Standards for Civics and Government* with roughly equal distribution. Since this national model provides the basic structure and content for civics and government standards in most state standards documents, it is encouraging that teaching about religion is quite prominently featured. Discussion of comparative governments might be enhanced to help students understand religious roots of civic values and government in other parts of the world, and the practical role of religious groups in civil society might be better represented, but the document handles the topic well and adequately overall.

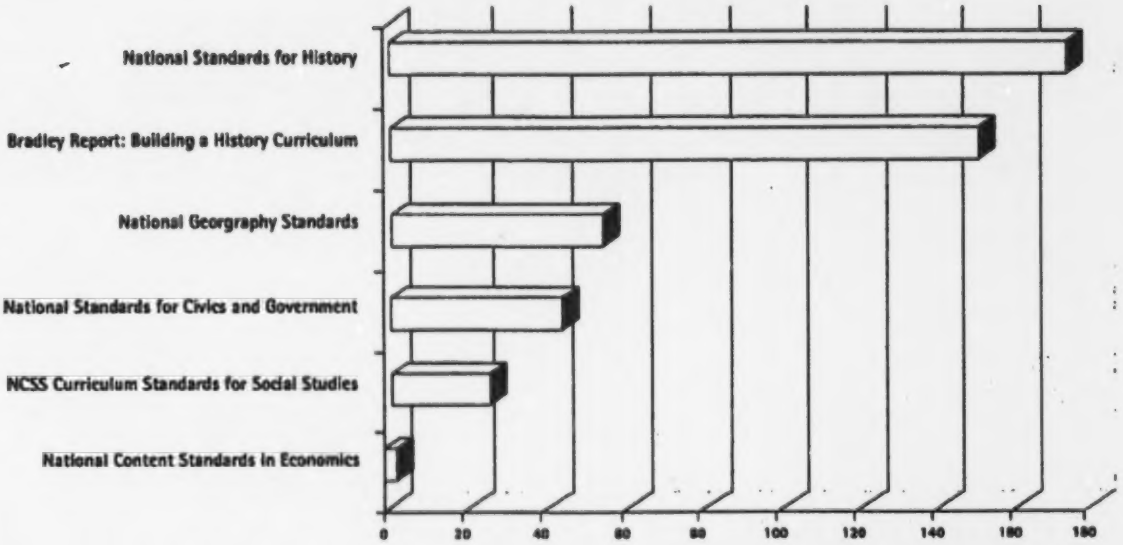
National Content Standards in Economics

Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics is a 30-page guide consisting of twenty content statements on essential economic principles, rationales for each, and benchmarks for grades 4, 8, and 12, with exemplars. Among the national standards efforts, the economics standards are the least inclusive of teaching about religion. The document represents a mechanistic view of the subject which, unlike civics, lacks any discussion about economic values based on religious beliefs, or religious ways of viewing economic choices. The effect, intentional or otherwise, is to foster the impression that economic principles are more analogous to immutable laws of physics and mathematics than to principles of government or other human systems of social organization. While national content standards should not recommend a course of moral behavior in the economic sphere, they should note that human beings have considered religious beliefs in economic decisions. Teachers inclined to discuss religious aspects of economics will find precious little guidance in the *Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics* on incorporating the religious dimension of economic life.

Analysis of State Standards and Framework Documents

Most state legislatures and departments of education joined the standards-based education reform bandwagon over the past decade. The states have

References to Religion in National Curriculum Models



published a wide variety of documents, ranging from brief lists to extensive frameworks with content standards to be covered and tested, teaching examples, skills mandates, and implementation guides. Some lay out courses for specific grade levels or set exit standards for high school graduation.

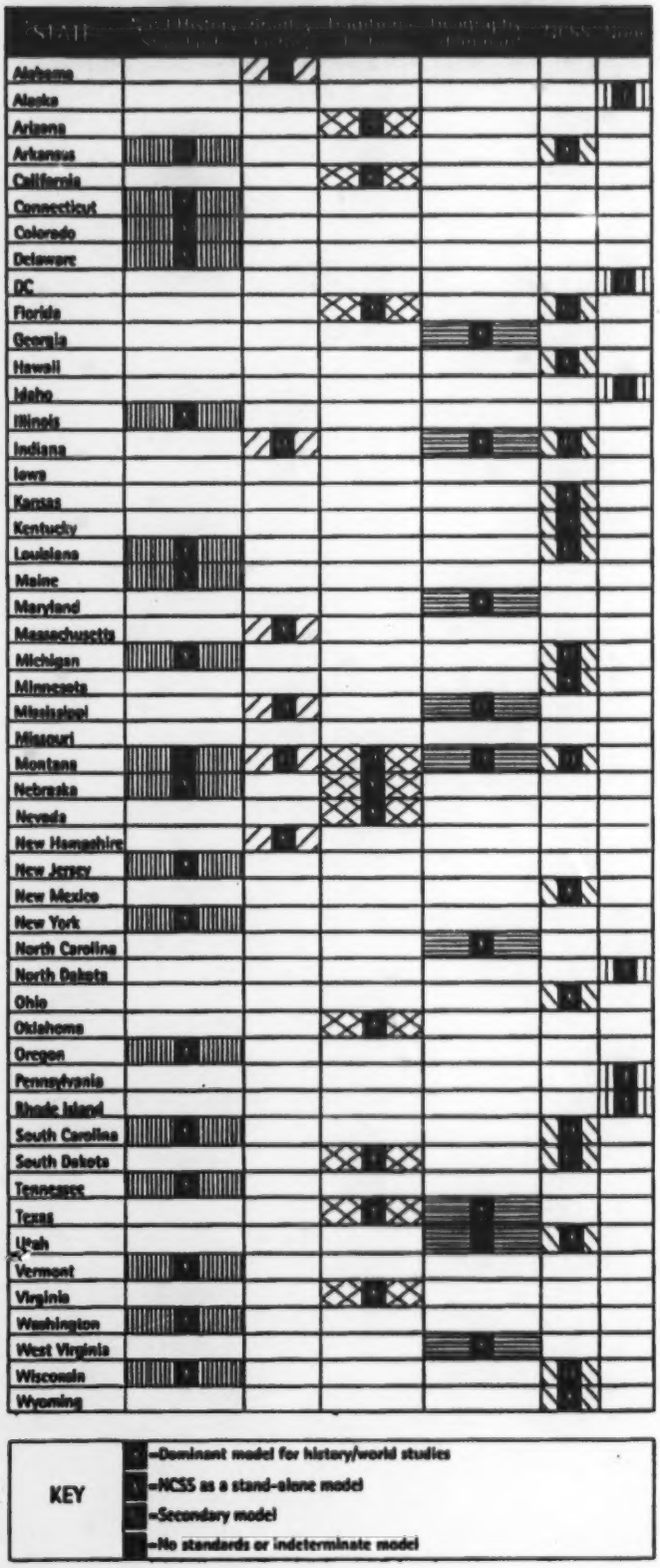
Although the notion of a national curriculum and testing program was soundly rejected, it can be clearly demonstrated that current state standards documents and curriculum frameworks reflect strong influence from the national models. Most state documents combine elements from several national models; many simply plug into each core subject area the basic national standards for history, geography, economics and civics. Predictably, the state documents vary most in setting history standards. Even in history, however, a few models dominate, although a handful of states developed history standards based on traditional outlines which owe little to the national models discussed in this study.

Grouping State Standards for Analysis

The state social studies standards in this study were grouped according to the documents' structure and approach to content, which significantly impact teaching about religion. Each group of states, however, includes documents that adhere closely to the model and those combining influences from several models. Some states are analyzed in more than one group. The chart shows how states were grouped in the study. For example, some states built their overall K-12 social studies program around the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) model, but use the Bradley Commission framework *Building a History Curriculum* or the National Center for History in the Schools framework *Lessons from History.*[1] Other states' traditional history outlines diverge from any national model. At this writing, a few states are still in the process of developing standards or implementation guides, and some set no standards or lack a social studies component.

1 Charlotte Crabtree, *Lessons from History*, National Center for History in the Schools, University of California, Los Angeles, 1989.

Table of Social Studies Models by State



Since teaching about religion is concentrated in US history, world history and geography courses, the model that states selected for US and world studies was the main grouping criterion. Detailed state analyses appear in the full study.

Teaching about Religion in State Standards on the NCSS Model

Nineteen state standards documents are based to some degree on the NCSS model, but they fall into two groups. Most states in this group "plug" one of the national standards or other models for the core disciplines of geography, economics, civics and history into the NCSS framework of strands that organize their K-12 program. A few states' standards adhere closely to the NCSS Expectations of Excellence as a stand-alone model and are shown in the **Table of Social Studies Models by State** marked in the **Table of Social Studies Models by State** with an "X". States that use a specific model for their history or world studies program are analyzed with that group of states, since significant differences in teaching about religion arise from these models.

These documents as a group mandate content in a generalized, categorical way. They tend to include little specific, mandated content in any of the core disciplines, and it is not always clear <u>how</u> the ten strands would be incorporated into the program at each grade level. State documents that use the NCSS model as a stand-alone have few

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direct references to religion, and these appear most often in conjunction with rubrics about cultural groups' attributes, such as ethnicity, language, gender, family, nationality and socioeconomic status. Typically, this group of state documents contains scant references to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism or any other specific tradition, or contains only omnibus standards that mandate teaching about all world religions. Utah, with its strong religious heritage, is the exception in this group, with over 40 direct references.

As in *Expectations of Excellence*, the NCSS group of state documents includes most teaching about religion in the form of indirect references, particularly under the broadly defined rubric of *culture*. A definition of *culture* taken verbatim from *Expectations of Excellence* is incorporated into several of these state documents and justifies the assumption that any reference to culture in those documents may include study of religion or beliefs. General references to culture are plentiful in this group of documents, ranging from 11 references to culture in the Arkansas standards to more than 60 cultural references in Utah's standards in addition to the direct references noted above. It is not justified to conclude that teaching about religion will not occur in states that follow the NCSS model, but these documents offer few assurances or specific guidance on teaching about religion.

State Standards Following History and Social Science Models

In a clear majority of state social studies standards, history courses dominate. In contrast to the ideally even distribution of social science disciplines across grade levels in the NCSS model, this group of states makes history the major vehicle for incorporating other content. Courses on economics, government/civics, and geography, however, are also offered in these programs.

History-dominant state programs are distinguished by two basic approaches to structuring world history content. Some states build US and world history around a traditional Western civilizations framework, although they do include some content on non-Western civilizations. A growing number of states, in contrast, utilize a more innovative model based on a framework of world history eras. These are divided among states using the Bradley Commission model *Building a History Curriculum* and those using the *National Standards for History*. The decisive element for teaching about religions is that the structure of eras provides a significantly different framework for history study from the traditional approach.

State Documents Based on the National Standards for History Model

Among states that incorporate the *National Standards for History* model, New York, Colorado, Delaware, and New Jersey have the most detailed content guidelines. Most state documents that incorporate all four national standards in core disciplines are quite sketchy. Because curriculum planners can return to the national standards documents for detailed content and explanation, their impact on instruction differs from those states whose standards are brief or vague without following a known model. A simple scorecard of citations on teaching about religion in the state standards documents, therefore, would not provide a clear indication of how much teaching about religion is likely in those states.

New York's standards, for example, have 53 direct references to religion and beliefs in general, and 13 references to specific religions, and about one third are elementary grade standards. Over 40 indirect references to *culture* add to this.

In this group of documents, a small number of references may translate into extensive instructional content. For example, in Era 4, "Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter (A.D. 300–1000)," Louisiana standards include "*tracing the expansion of major reli-*

gions and cultural traditions and examining the impact on civilization in Europe, Asia and Africa." Regions which were peripheral to the major civilizations are included in study of the development and spread of religious ideas and traditions, with comparisons among them. General requirements include topics following developments in religion through time and across cultures. Requirements to study religion in US history emphasize the role of religion in early American history and include later religious developments in United States history such as "*the Great Awakening, the Christian Abolitionists, the Mission System, the Mormon Trek, the founding of utopian religious communities...*" in Colorado. Typical elementary-grade references cite religion as a component of community, state and national identity, and some history-dominant states introduce world cultures in grades three and up. Most direct references to teaching about religion are listed under rubrics about history, while indirect references to culture reproduce objectives from the geography standards.

State Documents Based on Building a History Curriculum

A smaller number of history-dominant state documents incorporate eras and content from *Building a US [and] World History Curriculum*. The Bradley model has been a general influence in many state documents, though very few closely pattern their content on it. The most influential and positive aspect of the *Bradley Report* is adoption of its suggested course patterns for sequential US and world history courses from elementary through secondary grades.

Most of the state documents in this group contain a fair number of direct references to religion in the overall program. Massachusetts, for example, has 42 general and 87 rather unevenly distributed references to specific traditions. Mississippi's document has almost 50 general and specific references, more than 10 of them in Bible History and Minority Studies electives.

In most documents in this group, teaching about religion in American life is prominent in the colonial period and tapers off in later eras. Standards on modern world history include the common association of religion with conflict in contemporary life. The mixture of influences in these documents makes it difficult to group them with any one model or to predict how teaching about religion or any other topic will be incorporated into local curriculum. What sets these documents apart from the next group, however, is use of the chronological structure with its potential for greater coverage of themes like religion across eras, regions and cultures. On the other hand, if local districts adopt the "selected civilizations" approach recommended in *Building a History Curriculum*, then some regions or periods where religion was important may be omitted.

State Documents Based on Traditional History Surveys

In contrast to standards documents built around the national models, some states developed unique alternative models based on traditional history curriculum patterns. The documents in this group reflect frameworks for US and world history that have been used in textbooks and survey courses for decades. They reject the newer era-by-era structure of history study in favor of a traditional civilizations-based approach.

State standards documents in this group are distinguished by detailed outlines mandating study of a fixed sequence of events and topics from US history, and in world history a sequence of discrete civilizations. The various outlines differ from one another in exact wording, but they share many aspects of structure, content and emphasis. One such common aspect is limitation to a traditional narrative of US history and of the story of Western civilization dominating

over world history, and another aspect is a clearly expressed emphasis on moral/religious and patriotic values, particularly those perceived as core values of US and Western culture.

California's *History/Social Science Academic Standards* document, for example, retains the innovative elements embodied in the 1989 California History/Social Science Framework, which pioneered multi-year, draped history courses, with three-year sequences in both US and World History. California's minutely worded world history content mandates include 79 general and specific references to religion in the K-12 program.

These documents contain few general references to *culture*, and instead of omnibus standards on world religions, they feature content mandates tailored to each specific tradition. California's are among the most detailed and extensive, both in US and world history.

The traditional standards documents represent a well-intentioned but inconsistent approach. They emphasize multi-year history courses and show concern for the civic and intellectual value invested in study of history. Language imported from the national standards in geography, economics and civics indicates the desire for academic rigor. Some states in this group demonstratively rejected the *National Standards for History*, and although influence from the *Bradley Commission Report* is apparent in some, these states tailored history standards on their own. They seem most influenced by the desire to achieve a level of common cultural literacy and to reinforce common values native to the Western tradition, including emphasis on the Judeo-Christian tradition as a source. Except for California, these documents mandate little study of religious thought, institutions and change for any major tradition other than Christianity. Modern religions are nudged aside by secular topics from political, scientific, military, social and economic history, except for the frequent association with modern political conflicts.

Treatment of civilizations as discrete units in this group of documents also hinders acquisition of knowledge about world religions beyond the rudimentary. Non-European history receives short shrift under the "selected cultures" approach.

Lapses in adherence to the guidelines for teaching about religion seem more severe in this group than any other, despite the relative frequency of references to religions.

State Documents Based on Geography-Dominant Programs

The group of states in this category features social studies programs in which geography is the dominant focus at the middle school level. One- or two-year world studies courses form students' introduction to both history and geography in one course. These courses are the main vehicle for content of world religions, with high school courses in geography or world history completing the sequence.

The hallmark of these programs is the presence of a world geography survey course at grades 6 and/or 7 that is divided into Western Hemisphere and Eastern Hemisphere studies. Covering physical and human geography of the world continent-by-continent or region-by-region, they provide historical background on world cultures, but their major emphasis is the contemporary world. Some states cap these middle school courses with a one-year high school world history course, while others rely on them as a foundation for modern world history surveys in high school. This approach has significant implications for teaching about religions.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) is a well-organized, detailed standards document typical of the other geography-dominant state standards in terms of teaching about religion. TEKS has 42 gener-

al references to religion, and a few on specific religions, complemented by 39 references to culture. Early grades explore religion as an aspect of diversity in Texas and US society and its role in US history. Instead of a two-year world studies course, Texas middle schools cover the content in one-year studies of selected world regions.

Observations on the Geography-Dominant Model for World Studies

The salient factor affecting teaching about world religions in this group of states is the presence of one- or two-year world studies courses at grades 6 and 7, despite strong recommendations against one-year courses in the *Bradley Report*. Instead of a chronological, topical or thematic approach to world history, students learn about the contemporary world continent by continent. Religions are viewed as an aspect of cultural geography. Western Hemisphere studies cover aspects of European and American history with less content on religions than might be found in a typical world history textbook on the same topic. Eastern Hemisphere courses introduce world religions. There are two problems with this approach. First, they must cover both contemporary and ancient or medieval periods. The distant past is portrayed as an explanation for present circumstances, without knowledge of intervening history. The usual textbook solution to this dilemma is to present a brief, superficial summary as "historical background" to present cultural characteristics.

Study of history in a continent-by-continent geographic survey makes it very difficult to draw connections among cultures, in contradiction to the documents' own requirements. No matter what high expectations for analytical skills are written into the standards, and no matter how excellent and varied the national geography standards are, these courses are simply overloaded. As for the regional approach, the *National Geography Standards* states that regions change with time, but the organization of geography courses defies this. Imposing modern ways of grouping countries upon ancient and medieval history hinders understanding of migration, trade routes, use of the environment, and the influence of religions. Historical events and processes that took place outside the scope of modern regions may be missed. Modern world history or geography courses that claim to build upon this knowledge a grade or two later will find a very shaky foundation at best.

Other States

There are several states with only general skills documents or guidelines and several more that have set no standards at all. At this writing, the process of setting social studies standards was underway in the three states and the District of Columbia. It is unlikely, however, that the conclusions reached in this study on patterns of teaching about religions would be significantly altered by newly posted documents.

Fine Arts and Language Arts Standards

Every state that has a standards document has Language Arts standards, and some states without social studies standards often include a reference or two to religion in the literature program. In states whose standards documents include specific content in Language Arts (reading, writing, listening and speaking), and Fine Arts (visual arts, music, dance), general references to religion are often included. They mandate skills in interpreting, appreciating and understanding culture, tradition or ethnicity through examples of art and literature. Students discern how beliefs, values and ideals are expressed in examples of historical and contemporary artworks. Implementation of teaching about religion in literature and arts programs may be closely related to

social studies in some cases. Many state curriculum guidelines emphasize coordination of history and humanities.

Overview of the Study's Conclusions and Recommendations

The national and state documents were found to reflect a number of significant trends in teaching social studies, or history and social science, which were shown to have implications for teaching about religions.

Current national and state standards documents demonstrate the degree to which teaching about religion has become an established topic in public school curricula.

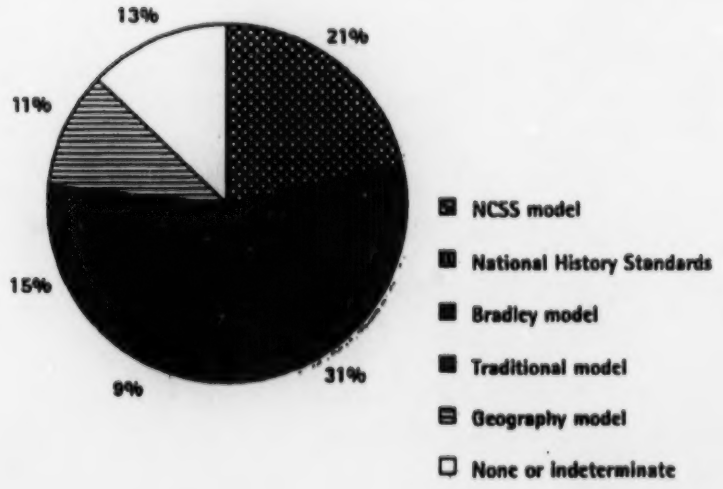
- These documents are a valid gauge of instruction because they are based on legislatively mandated requirements, and many are linked to accountability programs.
- One positive by-product of standards-based education reform has been to significantly raise the prestige and capital of history/social science and social studies in relation to other core subject areas.

Most state standards documents in the core subject areas of history, geography, civics, and economics are closely related to the national standards and framework models published during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

- State standards developers drew on one or more of the national standards and other curriculum framework models, and local districts will draw upon them again in developing detailed programs of study aligned with the standards.

Analysis shows that teaching about religions has been included to some degree in every one of the national and state standards documents in social studies as well as many language arts (literature) and arts (visual arts, music and dance) standards, as indicated by direct and indirect references to religion.

Chart for State Model Adherence



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- Placement of content on teaching about religions follows similar patterns in most standards documents.
- Most teaching about religions takes place in US history and world history, geography or cultural studies courses, with some content appearing in early elementary grades.
- US history taught in elementary, middle school and high school includes the role of religion according to predictable patterns, emphasizing religious motives in exploring and colonization, 18th-century developments and religious thought as a factor in struggles over slavery and in 19th-century reform movements. With few exceptions, religion in American life finds little mention in connection with study of the 20th century.
- World history has become a required course in many states, which will likely provide more to world religious traditions than in previous decades. The division of US and world history courses into two- or three-year chronological sequences rather than one-year marathon surveys also has the potential for improving coverage of religions.
- Electives outlined in several state standards programs indicate the presence of some in-depth teaching about religions.

An optimistic conclusion is that a place has been made in the curriculum for teaching about religion across the nation, and there is considerable room for advancing the quality of that coverage through implementation of existing curricular mandates. (See recommendations, below.)

- From elementary grades through high school, standards-based education provides opportunities for students to learn how religious beliefs and values affect identity, how they contribute to local, state, national and global communities, and how religious beliefs affect human behavior and decision-making.
- By the time they finish grade ten, most students across the United States will have been exposed to the basic outlines of the major world religions and the regional cultures with which they are associated.
- In elementary and secondary US history, civics and government, students will have been taught something about the role of religion in the origins and implementation of our system of government, and its historical role in US society.

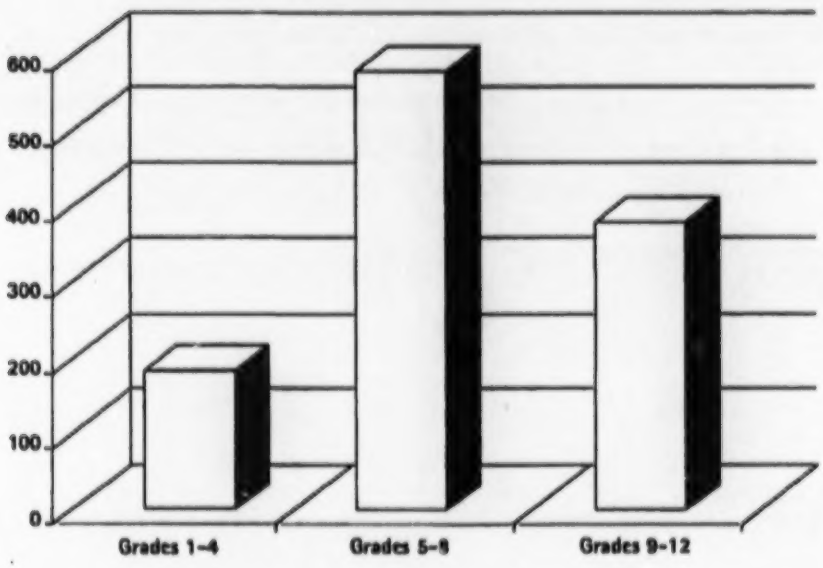
A more pessimistic conclusion is that teaching about religion, though included in all standards documents, may be treated superficially overall, and is likely to be excluded from many areas of social studies where it would be relevant.

- Religion in the early grades is taught mainly as a component of identity among diverse groups in US society, often confined to information on holidays and customs.
- In US history courses at the elementary and secondary level, coverage of religion tapers off after the colonial period, and appears infrequently after the Civil War period.
- Students will rarely be exposed to content on world religions before grades five, six or seven, and there may be little follow-up in later grades.
- World history/world studies courses provide information on the origins, beliefs, and practices of major world faiths, and trace their spread and associated cultures. These "thumbnail sketches" of religions and related societies cover only a few centuries at best. Few institutions and social customs are discussed, and historical developments in religious thought and institutions are rarely mentioned. The exception to this static treatment is Western Christianity, whose religious developments are followed through the 18th century, but little thereafter.

World history, world cultures and world geography courses laid out in the standards differ in their capacity to bring serious content and sound scholarship to teaching about world religions.

- A positive outcome of standards reform is the spread of multi-year world history or geography courses extending from middle to high school. Two- or three-year courses ensure greater depth and breadth, and encourage greater emphasis on critical thinking skills, multidisciplinary instruction, and exploration of primary sources.

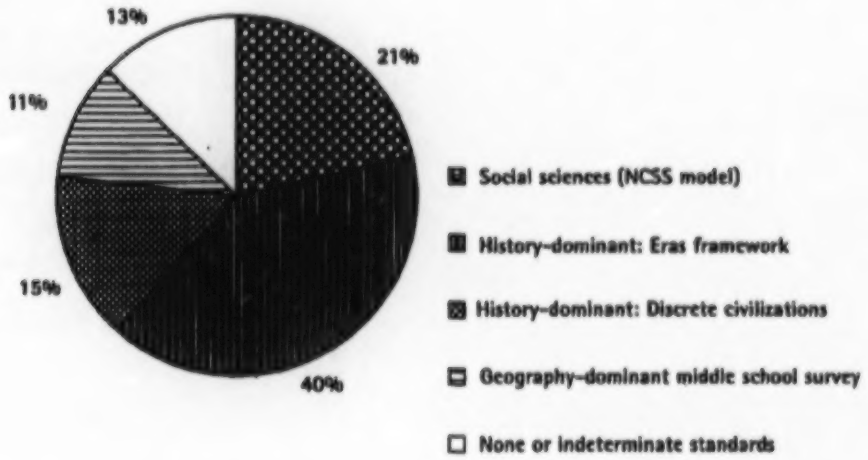
Direct References to Religion in State Standards Documents



- Courses based on traditional Western civilizations models often show uneven, superficial coverage of world religions.
- Traditional courses organized around a sequence of discrete civilizations are represented among the standards documents with varying degrees of depth and rigor, but all tend to limit coverage of religions other than Christianity to a one-shot discussion within a brief historical time frame. In several of these programs, religion appears in the modern period only as a source of conflict. Within this model, a few state standards envision a "selected civilizations" approach that often leads to very uneven coverage of world religions, omitting some major traditions entirely.
- World geography/world cultures courses divided into two-year Western Hemisphere/Eastern Hemisphere studies are found in several states' middle school programs. These courses are problematic vessels for teaching about religion despite the excellence and wide acceptance of the *National Geography Standards*. Content overload is a major obstacle, since these courses juxtapose ancient and medieval history with complex contemporary political, economic, ecological and social issues. Global historical processes, including the development and spread of religious traditions, are almost impossible to teach in courses that are organized around continent-by-continent or country-by-country coverage.
- The best history education model for teaching about world religions is a survey course structured around a series of world or national eras. The emergence of a world history model based on systematic global and chronological coverage of world history, exemplified by the framework of the *National Standards for World History*, entails distinct advantages for teaching about religions:

  (1) Discussion of religious traditions is not limited only to those associated with major civilizations;
  (2) coverage of the major religions is not confined to the geographic or temporal boundaries of a few major civilizations;
  (3) study is structured around an innovative framework of historical eras studied chronologically across the globe, which permits in-depth introduction to each tradition and its institutions as well as continuous coverage of change through each era from its origins to the modern day;

Chart of States' History/Geography Survey Structure



(4) the framework and scholarship embodied in the new world history model takes religion very seriously, overcoming the limitations of one-shot coverage and imbalances among traditions.

Implications of This Study and Recommendations

The state standards documents do not cast teaching about religion or any other topic in cement, nor do they replace educators' task of developing content. To the contrary, they represent a skeletal beginning, which educators will flesh out with detail, use of primary and secondary sources and, it is hoped, activities that encourage comprehension and analysis. For better or worse, the standards as written leave considerable room for flexibility in the implementation phase. There are opportunities built into the process for feedback from local administrators, test-makers, teachers and citizens. There are also significant obstacles to full implementation of standards: class size, teacher competency, students' reading ability, and school budgets for new materials and staff development.

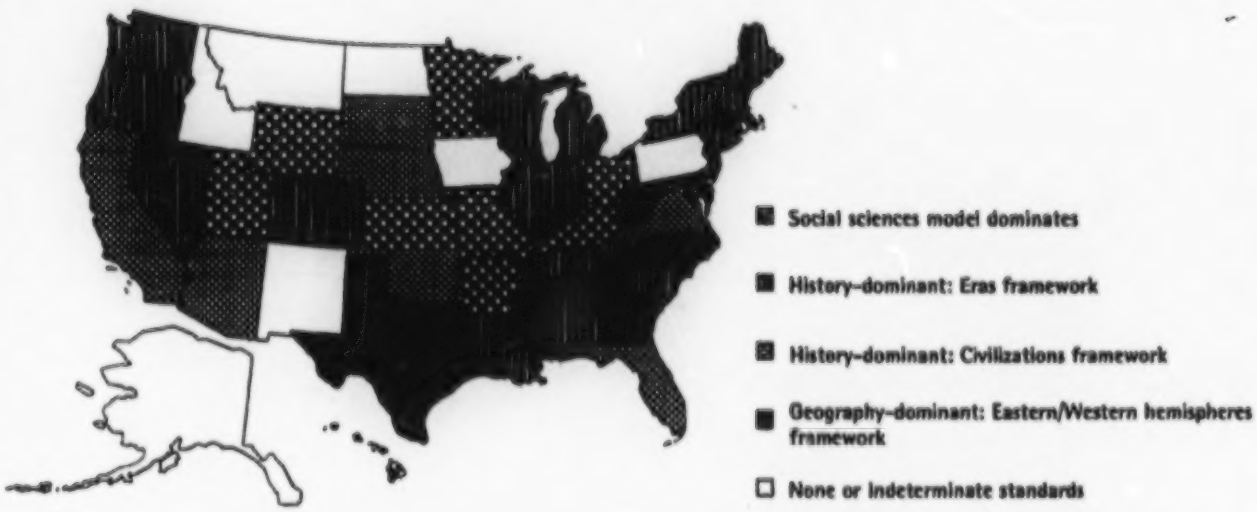
The ball is now in the court of those who are concerned enough to support teaching about religion in the schools. In order for students and teachers to achieve maximum benefit from the opportunity provided by standards-based reform, educators and education advocates must take steps over the next several years to realize the implications contained in these mandates, to support the potential found in well-constructed standards programs, and to mitigate possible ill effects of poorly designed standards.

Equipped with the information in this study, educators and scholars, local communities, civic organizations and professional institutions may work toward maximizing sound instruction about religion within the current framework of standards-based education. The following represent areas where activity is needed and appropriate:

1. **Development of programs of study and teaching guides at the district level**

- The opportunity to include mandated content on basic beliefs, practices and historical developments of religions in the world and the United

States' World History/Geography Course Structure



States represents an opportunity that can either be missed or utilized to improve what is currently present in the curriculum.

- Elaboration of the bare-bones mandates is being carried out at the state, district and school level in the form of thick auxiliary documents containing course outlines, lesson plans, correlation with adopted instructional material and supplementary resource lists. Support of this development process will have a profound impact on the quality of classroom teaching, and will in many states provide the database from which test items are drawn.
- Quality instruction depends upon establishing sound frameworks for discussion of each religious tradition, ensuring both that they meet the guidelines for teaching about religion and that they incorporate excellent scholarship. Attention to this level of implementation can go far toward bridging gaps and redressing any imbalances in the state standards documents.

2. Assessment design and testing programs

- Under standards-based education, which includes rigorous testing programs, the regular appearance of certain topics as test items will ensure that they are carefully taught, and their omission will reduce or eliminate the likelihood of inclusion over time. In other words, if knowledge of the religions is not assessed, teachers under pressure to produce results will de-emphasize the topic in their lesson planning.
- The structure of assessment tools and the content of test items must be monitored for both quality and adherence to the guidelines for teaching about religions. Reduction of content on world religions to mere factual content would result in trivializing spiritual traditions in the classroom, and encouraging facile analysis of their complex history.

3. Design and adoption of instructional materials

- During the next several years, textbooks and other instructional media will be modified and developed to align with state standards mandates, particularly in large, influential states. This process will include Internet-based systems that key standards to web sites, instructional software and other non-textbook resources in addition to the traditional adopted texts.

- Through authorship, consultation and review, scholars can dramatically improve teaching about religion and ensure that it meets the guidelines.
- Ensuring that states, districts and teachers are aware of excellent instructional resources reflecting current scholarship is an important way to improve instruction and avoid restriction of available resources to the offerings of large, commercial producers.

4. **Teacher training**

- Regardless of how universal basic instruction on religions has become across the states, teachers still lack the pre-service and in-service training they need to fulfill state mandates and expand instruction beyond the thumbnail sketch, and too many teachers are still very uncomfortable with the topic of religions.
- Departments of education and religious studies at universities must become aware of the need to develop both basic courses and community outreach programs.
- Various types of professional and community organizations can assist in providing resources and training to teachers in programs carefully structured around the guidelines for teaching about religions and reflective of excellent scholarship.

5. **Revision of existing state standards documents**

- States which have invested prestige and financial resources in developing current standards may not permit revision in the short term, but within the next few years revision cycles will allow modifications of mandated content and course structure.
- In those states with standards that violate the guidelines, pressure should be brought to bear to make necessary modifications in advance of normal revision cycles.
- It is important to raise the level of awareness concerning possibilities open to teaching about religion among citizens whose resources and participation are essential for the success of the enterprise. An important means of achieving these goals is to engage the media in disseminating a realistic and suitably complex view of standards-based education as it applies to teaching about religion.

Conclusion

Examination of the placement, quantity and characteristics of content on religion is encouraging, but also reveals limitations and gaps in integrating discussion of the human religious experience in the nation's social studies standards. Despite religion's secure place in state and national standards, it is possible to conclude that teaching about religion in US public school social studies programs is in fact limited, and it is questionable whether the topic is being pursued with much seriousness or depth. Given the current universal interest in the topic and the momentum of the standards-based movement, the question becomes how to tap this enormous potential. Rather than complaining about the current state of affairs and waiting for the curriculum development wheels to turn through another cycle, it may be more constructive to find ways to enhance teaching about religions through the implementation of current mandates.

The study produced by CIE and the First Amendment Center is intended to facilitate this line of activity. The complete document provides in-depth evaluation and analysis of content on religion in several national and numerous state documents, with full discussion of prevailing history models, guidelines for teaching about religion, implications of standards documents and many other related topics mentioned in this summary. Contact CIE or the First Amendment Center for a copy of the complete study, or view it online at: www.cie.org and www. freedomforum.org.

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Affiliated Scholars

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Dr. Rkia E. Cornell, Research Assoc. Professor of Arabic Stds.	University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR
Dr. Vincent Cornell, Professor of History & Director, M.E. Studies Prgm.	University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR
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Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi, Adjunct Professor of Religion	California State University, Fullerton, CA
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